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ABSTRACT

Differing viewpoints, expressed in these two papers, address the question of whether college summer institutes should coach high school debaters on the current national debate topic. The first paper presents a three-part argument against coaching on the current topic: (1) the educational potential of summer workshops is not fully realized because current emphasis is more on coaching the upcoming national debate topic than on teaching debate; (2) the competitive nature of most workshops undermines the broader, more fundamental teaching goals; (3) the institutes can be improved by substituting teaching for coaching. The reaction paper argues that time constraints plague both debaters and coaches and discusses the coach's role in the teaching of forensic fundamentals, emphasizing the need for the coach to understand the new topic at issue. High school coaches should assume the primary function of teaching the fundamentals and college summer institutes should build on those fundamentals within the framework of the current national debate topic. (JD)

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College Summer Institutes Should Not Coach High School Debaters on the Current High School Debate Topic

Stevan Kalmon

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For the National Forensic League Conference on the State of Debate -- Kansas City, Missouri -- August, 1985

A position paper on the question, "Should a college summer institute be allowed to coach high school debaters on the current high school debate topic?"

Position taken: College summer institutes should not coach high school debaters on the current high school debate topic.

Author: Stevan Kalmon, Speech and Debate Teacher at The College Preparatory School, Oakland, California

Implicit in many of the issues presented to the Conference is the tension between the education and competitive aspects of forensics. Our ideal is that we teach skills and values; our reality is that we compete. I think we generally agree that the teaching should guide our activity, that we compete in order to learn. But perhaps much of our present concern can be linked to the tendency for the competition to direct the teaching. Tournament sweepstakes and number of Nationals qualifiers become more compelling measures of forensic success than the mere accomplishment of developing generally articulate students.

The use of summer forensics institutes by our community typifies the tension between educational and competitive goals. We hope that the institutes will help develop the skills and knowledge of our students; we are dismayed when they crank out motor-mouthing monsters armed with piles of poorly-evidenced briefs on apparently spurious issues. Yet we return the kids to the institutes each summer, partly in the hope that next time they'll really learn to debate, but more plausibly in the expectation that they'll be more competitive in the upcoming season.

"Coaching" the topic at summer institutes reflects but one way in which the competitive instinct holds too much power with us all. While we cannot ignore the reality of our urge to compete (and our "need" to be competitive with the other members of our community), we need to resist the constant urge. To that end, we should design our central institutions more to encourage the fulfillment of our educational ideals. We can do so in part by changing the focus of the summer institutes: Rather than coaching the upcoming national topic, the summer programs should use the topic as a practical model for teaching the fundamentals of forensics.

At a glance, the difference between coaching the topic and using the topic to teach debate may not seem significant, but substantial differences in educational philosophy and in practical teaching techniques are involved. I hope to demonstrate these differences by discussing the value (actual and potential) of summer institutes, the problems in current use, and how to improve the institutes by substituting teaching for coaching.

Value of Summer Forensics Institutes.

Summer workshops present tremendous opportunities for both high school debaters and high school coaches because they concentrate forensic talent and intellect in a setting in which both have the time to flourish. Virtually unlimited access to a university library, experts in our craft, experts on the topic issues, and the time to focus on debate, unhindered by other subjects or the immediate pressures of upcoming tournaments,...Such luxuries simply are not available to the vast majority of us during the school year. This advantage was noted by

the National Developmental Conference on Forensics as one of several contributions provided by the institutes. In addition to the "focused period of intense forensic preparation," the Developmental Conference listed as contributions the "additional opportunities for learning and applying argumentation and communication theories," the motivation for students to excel, and the "opportunity for interaction between high school and college students and faculty." (Recommendation I, p. 1)*

It is important to emphasize that the concentration of resources and time are not just available to high school students; the institutes also present an opportunity for intense interaction between high school teachers and the institutes' staffs. High school coaches can teach in the workshops, as some do, or can attend coaches' workshops. (Developmental Conference Recommendation V.)

In addition, the institutes are a primary source of innovation in forensics. The Developmental Conference pointed out that "The forensics activity often perpetuates traditional practices and methods at the expense of experimentation.... The workshop situtation is an excellent source for the dynamic benefits of innovations and research which are necessary for the healthy growth and practice of forensics activities." (Recommendation VI, p. 1) While some of us feel the institutes promote altogether too much innovation, we must recognize that experimentation and change are essential to our activity. Our problem, perhaps, is not too much innovation but not enough active participation in it by the entire forensics community.

But the central purpose of the summer programs -- and, it is hoped, their chief attraction -- is that they teach the fundamentals of forensics. For example, we want our students to know how to conduct effective research; and the institutes, by concentrating intellectual talent and time, ought to serve as the ideal setting for developing the skill. The Developmental Conference observed that "Students should know how to conduct original research,...should be taught the importance of accurately recording evidence,...and should understand the necessity of being true to source context and assumptions." To acquire such understanding requires patient, often frustrating hours of hard work by the student and teacher alike. The summer programs make the hours and expertise available for this work. In the same manner, institutes provide the opportunity for intensive work on all the fundamentals of debating that usually must be neglected during the school year, such as planning a rebuttal, conducting cross-examination, or learning argumentation theory.

In general, the summer workshops provide tremendous opportunity for learning and developing the forensic craft. Yet this educational potential is not fully realized because current emphasis is more on coaching the upcoming national debate topic than on teaching debate.

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*The National Developmental Conference on Forensics ("Developmental Conference"), sponsored by the American Forensics Association, the Speech Communication Association, and several other forensics associations, was conducted from September 12 through September 15, 1984, in Evanston, Illinois. Quotations in this paper are taken from the six Recommendations and supporting Rationales adopted by the Developmental Conference with respect to summer institutes. Citations at the end of each quotation refer to the Recommendations by the numbers designated by the Developmental Conference.

Problems with Summer Institutes.

The competitive focus of workshops is striking, and predictable. Given the nature of forensics and the nature of our community, summer programs inevitably are judged by the numbers of winners they produce. The best known programs are typically those which consistently produce the biggest winners; and such reputations are more than a little useful in the enrollment competition with other workshops. Moreover, institutes' staffs are usually quite competitive folks; indeed, most are selected for their competitive success rather than their teaching experience. The Developmental Conference observed that "One of the unique characteristics of many summer institutes is the heavy reliance on college students who have little or no experience in a teaching role. Their success as debaters and individual speakers and performers does not guarantee equal success in teaching." (Recommendation II, p. 1) While the college students may be especially vulnerable to competitive impulses, their vulnerability is hardly unique. The workshops compete with each other; within the workshops, the teachers often compete.

Consequently, workshop sessions are more often used to compete rather than to teach. Coaching the topic during workshops sessions becomes the mechanism for conducting the competition, just as it does for all of us during the school year. Several problems result, a few of which are listed below:

1. The workshops encourage the development of evidence and argument shortcuts rather than the development of thoughtful research and analysis. Handbook evidence is easier to find and use, and it can more readily be turned into successful briefs and arguments for the institute tournament. Hours spent typing cards and handbook-based briefs are much more immediately rewarding than equivalent hours spent conducting original research. It is easier still to exchange college-generated briefs and arguments and spend the hours concentrating on the strategies for using them (not to mention the exquisite pleasures of reading them at championship velocities).

2. The institutes tend to approach the topic strategically rather analytically. Instead of providing the broad background, essential context, and fundamental understanding which we would like our students to carry into the year, the workshops provide strategic shortcuts for winning debates. Squirrel cases and generic counterplans are obvious examples; the successful institute student usually emerges with these in his forensic arsenal, not with a deep understanding of the national topic (or, generally, of the generic he will use to circumvent the topic).

3. The workshops tend to promote winning at the expense of developing a competition ethic. The purpose of forensics becomes trophy-hunting: the top lab, the institute tournament, the tournaments during the year. The lab leaders compete with each other for the best students and workshop record; the students quickly learn that the point is finding the best avenue (probably within the rules) to win.

4. The institutes fail to teach fundamental forensic skills. At every step, the pressure to produce immediate results, to be a winner, takes precedence over the longer, more difficult, less obviously rewarding process of developing skills. As research gives way to handbooks and pre-fabricated briefs, argumentation theory gives way to paradigm manipulation and rebuttal planning reduces to shorter arguments said more quickly. As for cross-examination, well, it doesn't go on the flow anyway, but humor is useful.

Each of these problems feeds the others. The strategic shortcuts support the research neglect; the trophy-hunting justifies the failure to learn fundamental skills. And all these problems stem from an abuse of competitive instincts. The workshops coach the kids on the topic, and teaching often gets lost. The solution is to promote broader, more fundamental teaching goals, to seek as much as possible to put coaching aside for the summer.

Teaching Instead of Coaching.

If summer programs diligently maintained a philosophy of teaching forensics, they could fulfill their promise much more effectively. They could use the time and resources to teach the skills and values students need -- from writing cases to an ethic for competition. The national topic could be used in such a setting as the subject of practice debates, a source of examples for theory development, and the basis for learning to analyze and research a broad subject area.

Several pragmatic applications of this principle come to mind. The list below is not meant to be exclusive, nor will everyone agree with it. But it is offered in an effort to demonstrate the difference between coaching the topic and using the topic to teach debate:

1. Ban handbooks and handbook evidence from the workshops. If all of a student's evidence had to be generated by the student's own original research, kids would learn more about research. Likewise, strategic shortcuts on the topic might be replaced by more thoughtful analysis.

2. Ban brief pools, whether teacher- or student-generated. The rational is the same as above.

3. Provide more lectures on the topic as a network of social, political, and historical issues rather than a subject for strategic manipulation. Encourage the thinking while the students have time to do it.

4. Eliminate lab strategy sessions. Use the debate labs more to work on fundamentals -- principles of case-writing, for example -- and for practice. Such work may not win the next debate, but the knowledge will serve more in the long run.

5. Emphasize the use of critiqued practice sessions and closely supervised research. Use the staff expertise to provide individual attention to each student's basic learning, rather than the development of specific winning strategies.

6. Eliminate the institute tournament. Substitute practice debates, with critiques and re-working of problem speeches and cases. Such a move by itself might do much to divert the focus of institute staff members from short-term coaching efforts to longer-term teaching goals.

7. Increase the involvement of high school coaches, both as students and teachers. This recommendation was offered by the Developmental Conference because such involvement would "improve the quality of forensics instruction in secondary schools and it would assist college sponsors in modifying instructional practices in summer workshops to meet more completely the educational needs of participants." (Recommendation V, p. 1) Summer institutes could offer coaches' programs, such as the one Kansas University once administered, which run concurrently with the student programs and are integrated with them. The institutes could also make

more use of coaches in the regular workshop, perhaps, for example, establishing mentor programs in which college debaters and high school coaches work together (teaching each other while they teach the students).

I have not addressed specific implementation or enforcement of these suggestions; but all could be accomplished and, in one summer program or another, have been applied successfully. Northwestern University's summer program bans handbooks and brief pools, with considerable success; and that program has developed the criqued practice session quite effectively. One high school coach in California (Robert Pacillo of Mt. Carmel High School) runs a two-week program for his squad; he supervises basic research and extensive practice, and he develops excellent debate teams. The rewards of teaching are not usually as concrete or immediate as those of coaching. Teaching requires more patience, more self-discipline. But it reflects a better goal.

It does not take much to discern that the criticisms aimed in this paper at summer institutes apply equally to all of us in the coaching community. It is easier to focus on the institutes. First, we prefer to have someone else to blame for the problems in our activity. Second, the institutes provide a concentrated moment in the forensic life of our kids -- a moment that holds powerful potential and one which seems somehow more manageable than the more diffuse moments of our coaching during the school year. If, however, we can give serious consideration to the need for institutes to teach more and coach less, then we can begin to consider the same need within ourselves.

For the National Forensic League Conference on the State of Debate

Kansas City, Missouri---August 1985

A reaction paper to the position taken by Stevan Kalmon on the question, "Should a college summer institute be allowed to coach high school debaters on the current high school debate topic?"

Mr. Kalmon's position---College summer institutes should not coach high school debaters on the current high school debate topic.

Reaction: The fundamentals must be taught first and foremost by the high school coaches working with debaters each season. The high school institutes should build on those fundamentals while dealing with the topic.

Author: Robert Brittain, Debate Coach at Columbia City High School, Columbia City, Indiana.

Mr. Kalmon says that "the workshops coach the kids on the topic, and teaching often gets lost. The solution is to promote broader, more fundamental teaching goals, to seek as much as possible to put coaching aside for the summer." In this reaction paper, I will suggest that high school coaches should assume the primary function of teaching the fundamentals, and that the college summer institutes should build on those fundamentals in terms of the current national topic.

Mr. Kalmon correctly establishes the value of the summer institute in terms of the time available to really concentrate on debating and the study of that activity. He identifies the frustation of every coach and every student when he notes how much work must be wrapped into such a short period of time during the regular school year. This desperate sharing of time forces every debater and every coach to work as efficiently as possible. Failure to do so will result in either debate or academic failure, maybe both. Thus the summer institute is truly a luxury in terms of the time available to work on debate and debating. However, before we turn to what can or should be done by the summer institute, let's first discuss what the coach needs to be doing while working with debaters in the high school setting.

The role of the high school coach

The high school coach is on the front line every day of the year. The coach is the one person who is in the best position to deal with fundamentals because he is the first debating expert the potential debater will meet. The coach sets the tone for his debaters from the first team meeting of the year when the potential debater shows up at the beginning of his high school career. To leave "teaching" fundamentals to the college clinic at the end of the debater's first year of interscholastic debate is a little bit late. Those bad research habits, acceptance of poor quality evidence, and over reliance on handbooks will be learned by the debaters long before any college summer debate clinic can instill those poor habits. The high school coach is the one who must help debaters learn to balance sharing evidence and outlines, doing first-rate research, and using common sense. So, if the college people are guilty of flooding the debate community with high school debaters who fail to heed the fundamentals of the art of debating, the high school coaches must accept the responsibility for introducing the sin originally. Thus it would seem that if transferring fundamentals of debating to debaters is the issue, the high school coaches would be the people to do this job. However, the nature of fundamentals should be so important that failure to teach and apply them would result in enough disaster for a debater that such an enterprising person would be forced to apply them, especially if his primary goal has been subverted to "trophy-hunting."

Sooner or later, the team which is fundamentally weak does not win, so if competition has become so overpowering, why does the charge of weak fundamentals follow? It would seem that "trophy hunting" would place an even greater premium on applying fundamentals correctly. All of us in the forensic community have seen good but fundamentally weak debate teams fail in the critical rounds. Most of us have seen fundamentals win out in the end. If teams judged by coaches to be fundamentally weak are winning, then the colleges either know more of the fundamentals than the high school coaches do, or we have the wrong people judging debate rounds. So what must the high school debate coach do?

The coach must develop the forensic foundation. The coach must teach the debaters that it takes several years to build a quality team, and that the real fun comes with the ethical battle of wits. First and foremost coaches cannot abdicate the teaching of fundamentals to others. The coach must demonstrate these values every time he has contact with his charges. No one else will have more impact than the coach. The high school debate coach must accept the responsibility for teaching and coaching the fundamentals. No one else can really do that. Now that we have discussed the coach's role with the forensic fundamentals, we need to touch base with the coach's background on the topic area.

The coach needs to understand the new topic

One of the more exciting, yet burdensome, responsibilities of coaching a debate team is to become knowledgeable about each new topic. Each year we have a new topic to research ourselves. True, after a few years we have built a small depository of ideas that can be applied to a variety of topics, but it is an unusual debate coach who is extremely knowledgeable about a topic when it is first selected. We are then faced with the burden of studying that topic, wrapping up the old season, and giving eager young debaters the advice they seek on the new topic. Thus a debate institute offering expert analysis of the subject area becomes very tempting for both debaters and their coaches. Here is an opportunity for experts to do what needs to be done while the coach has a fighting chance to catch up on the topic. It becomes most logical for debaters, their coaches, and the summer clinics to offer the advanced debaters time to study the new topic and apply that information in the form that it will be used later in the fall. Given everyone's concern about efficient use of time, study or even coaching on the new topic could easily be welcomed by the clients of summer institutes.

At this point the problem Mr. Kalmon stresses enters the scene. If the summer institute seems to ignore the fundamentals which the coach has taught, the student could think that the fundamentals are not all that important because the college people have gone straight to the topic. Thus we are faced with the typical dilemma which faces educators perpetually. What can we assume our charges were taught before they arrived in our classrooms? We want to get to new material as soon as possible without repeating what they already know. At the same time, if we do not specially mention material covered by other teachers at an earlier time, some students will jump to the conclusion that it is no longer necessary to deal with that material. After all, no one mentioned the rule this year. Grammmar offers a good example. Very few high school teachers tell their students that periods are needed at end of each sentence. They assume students have learned this information and they expect the rule to be used correctly by their students. Not mentioning the rule does not mean that it no longer applies. Thus students not using this fundamental rule will suffer. No one listens to the defense that it was not mentioned this year. A student attempting to operate on the assumption that a rule not mentioned this year does not apply soon realizes, painfully, the error of his assumption. Educators, then, do expect their students to bring knowledge with them and to apply it without being specifically told to do so. The summer debate institutes should be no different.

The summer institutes should reinforce the fundamentals

I would hope that the summer debate institutes would reinforce the fundamentals which have been taught by the high school coaches while giving the high school debaters detailed insight into the new topic. The good summer institutes would not advertise themselves as the end of the research process, but those institutes would leave their clients with a foundation upon

which they would build. Fundamental debating skills would be reinforced while the student would have a variety of ideas relevant to the new topic which would be explored during the up-coming debate season. This type of summer institute would open doors for further research. I would hope that a student coming home from such an experience would be ready to push himself further. He would not think that all of his research was done and he need only sit back and wait for the season to begin. Yes, I would agree with Mr. Kalmon. Let's ban the handbooks, the brief pools, and the institute tournament. But let's work on the topic because that is where most of us as coaches will need the most help.

Let me finish with an underview if I may use that debate term. High school debate coaches are very protective of our charges. We struggle with them in the classrooms, and we work with them on their debating, and then we live with them on the weekends through the good times and through the bad times. We know our charges are very special people, yet we know they must fit into a broader society and that neither the student nor the coach can let that "special people" category hinder the development of the student. When bright high school debaters work with bright college debaters and college staff people for a few weeks at a summer institute, the "special people" category can be enhanced and not placed in its proper perspective. Well-meaning monsters may arrive at the high school practice session in September because the specialness of the college setting has not been tempered with the more realistic high school setting the debater must work within for the next school year.

High school debate coaches must accept the responsibility for teaching the fundamentals of the activity. The colleges running summer institutes should attempt to reinforce those fundamentals, but they should also offer their clients topic analysis and the opportunity to apply those fundamentals within the frame work of the current high school topic. When the institute fails that goal, then the community must re-evaluate the usefulness of such a summer clinic.